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LETTERS

Tagging "Infiltrators"

It is an unwelcome sign of the times that Bill Wattenburg's Policy Forum "Fluorescent barriers to infiltration" appeared in *Science* (26 Aug., p. 1184), instead of in a military ordnance journal. Wattenburg proposes to block illegal immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border by aerial dusting with fluorescent chemicals, thereby tagging would-be "infiltrators" into San Diego. The danger in such a scheme is less in its dubious practical outcome than in its invitation to scientists to collaborate with xenophobia. Those of us who find human tagging distasteful, whether with fluorescent dyes or yellow stars, must question his premises.

Immigrants, legal or otherwise, have long been a convenient scapegoat for troubled economies. California's fiscal crisis stems from long-term decline in manufacturing, politically expedient tax cuts, and an overheated real estate market. The widespread belief, echoed by Wattenburg, that illegal immigrants are a drain on the economy and cause unemployment among U.S. workers has been effectively challenged by demographers. Politicians from David Duke to California Governor Pete Wilson obscure these realities by targeting undocumented workers, invariably those with dark skin. One product of this movement, the "Save Our State" proposition on the November ballot, would deny schooling and basic medical care to California's undocumented immigrants.

Experience suggests that high-tech gadgets are no match for desperate and determined people. During the Vietnam War, the "Jason" group of elite scientists arranged for 20,000 sensors of various types to be dropped on the Ho Chi Minh Trail to interdict Northern "infiltration." This "McNamara Line" was notoriously ineffective; reportedly, the North Vietnamese decoyed "people sniffers" by hanging bags of urine in the trees. We can expect similar resourcefulness from Mexican immigrants, who after all are not criminals, but impoverished workers seeking a better life for their children. The real impact of Wattenburg's proposal would be to lend credibility to anti-immigrant hysteria, at present the leading edge of "respectable" racism in this country.

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Environmental Estrogens

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was pleased to read "Environmental estrogens stir debate" by Richard Stone (News & Comment, 15 July, p. 308), where it was stated that in "the debate over hormone-modulating pollutants," EPA has increased its emphasis "on the noncancer effects of the chemicals it regulates." This approach is characterized as "a fresh concern for EPA, which in the past has crafted regulations based mainly on chemical carcinogenicity." While EPA has indeed often emphasized chemical carcinogenicity, noncancer health effects are also considered in most of EPA's regulatory actions, and some regulations are based solely on effects other than cancer.

All of the statutes under which EPA regulates provide authority to regulate for noncancer health effects. For example, the Clean Air Act designates six criteria pollutants (lead, particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides, and carbon monoxide). Under this act, EPA must set a National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for each criteria pollutant for the entire United States "which in the judgment of [EPA], based on such criteria and allowing an adequate margin of safety, [is] requisite to protect the public health" (*1*).

The NAAQSs are based on a range of observed health effects which include respiratory effects, cognitive and neurobehavioral effects, reproductive effects, and death. None of the ambient air quality standards are based on carcinogenicity. In addition, the Clean Air Act lists 189 hazardous air pollutants that are subject to National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants. A large proportion of these pollutants are not considered to be possible human carcinogens and are instead regulated on the basis of noncancer effects.

In addition, health effects testing authorities under the Toxic Substances Control Act and the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act require testing of industrial chemicals and pesticides for multiple health endpoints, including mutagenesis, teratogenesis, behavioral disorders, and carcinogenesis. EPA uses this and other information in its ongoing evaluation of noncancer toxicity and regularly sets reference doses (RfDs), which are threshold levels of safe exposure for noncancer effects. These are routinely used in regulatory decisions.